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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: March 6, 1953

SUBJECT: Communism in Guatemala

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Guillermo Toriello Garrido
Mr. John M. Cabot

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AmEmbassy, Guatemala

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Ambassador Toriello called on Mr. Cabot today at his own request. The conversation started by an exchange of personal pleasantries, since Mr. Cabot had known him for a good many years. The Ambassador then said that he was sure that Mr. Cabot would understand the situation in Guatemala better than anyone else in Washington since he had been stationed there and knew everyone there so well. He said that things had changed greatly and that since the 1944 revolution Guatemala had undertaken a series of major social reforms in order to make it a truly democratic country. He mentioned, particularly, agrarian reforms and the granting of civil liberties. Because of these reforms, a tremendous campaign of calumnies was being waged against Guatemala both within the country and without. These calumniators spoke of communism in Guatemala, but the Guatemalan Government obviously could not put communists in jail or declare the communist party illegal if it respected the civil liberties it had granted.

Mr. Cabot said that he appreciated the frankness with which the Ambassador had spoken. Insofar as he could speak without intervening in Guatemala's internal affairs, he wanted to make it clear that the U.S. had nothing against social reform; on the contrary, the U.S. welcomed social reforms in any country. What did trouble the U.S. was the strength of the communist movement in Guatemala and the important positions occupied by the communists in the country. This was not

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was not strictly speaking an internal matter. As the Ambassador was aware, communists all over the world were the agents and instruments of Soviet aggression and imperialism and, as such, they were a danger to the peace and security of the hemisphere. The U.S. was not suggesting that the Guatemalan Government put these communists in jail or that it declare the party illegal. It was, however, seriously concerned at the fact that avowed communists occupied high posts in the Government and in other powerful organizations such as the labor unions. Moreover, the Government, if Mr. Cabot understood correctly, willingly accepted political alliance with the communists.

Ambassador Toriello said that after all Guatemala was a very small country and there were very few communists in the Government. He said that the head of the Social Security Bureau, an autonomous organization, was supposed to be a communist, but he was married to a land-owner's daughter. Fanjul was also called a communist, but he was a wealthy businessman. Even Fortuny used to be a supporter of Ubico and became a communist only after getting mental indigestion by reading Marx. The communists in Guatemala were all known and watched both by them and by us. They really were no danger to Guatemala's stability.

Mr. Cabot reiterated that he was not talking about any domestic radicalism in Guatemala, but rather of the fact that in key positions within the Government and elsewhere there were avowed agents of a foreign aggressive imperialist. He reminded the Ambassador of how the communists had come to power in Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

The Ambassador said that Guatemala wanted good relations with the U.S. and was prepared to cooperate in the spirit of hemispheric solidarity. Of course there were differences of opinion from time to time, as over Tunis, but on the major issues and particularly in confronting the menace of Soviet imperialism, Guatemala stood shoulder to shoulder with the U.S. Nevertheless Guatemala found constant "barriers" blocking its desire to cooperate. They had asked for 100 rifles and 200,000 rounds of ammunition and for tractors to build the Atlantic Highway and for airplanes and for parts, and had been turned down on all of them. The Ambassador had withdrawn his predecessor's objections to the proposed Inter-American Highway Agreement, but there was still no sign that the U.S. would sign the Agreement.

Mr. Cabot said that with regard to the delivery of any munitions, the Ambassador would understand that we were anxious as to who would be commanding the Guatemalan forces one or five years hence. With communist infiltration as far advanced as it was, this was an open question.

At this

At this moment Mr. Cabot had another appointment and it was agreed that the Ambassador and he would examine these matters further at a subsequent meeting.

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